

# Our Voice: Influence a generation in just a few hours a month

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A couple of months back, Washington State Supreme Court Justice Charles W. Johnson visited with the Herald editorial board. Mixed in with his message of how important it is for us to encourage and guide the next generation was a comment that in his own early years -- at a critical junction -- someone got him on the right path.

Most adults either had someone like that in their lives -- or craved it.

Perhaps the best thing we can do for a kid is care about them. Individually.

This week, two worthy programs have come to our attention. Both involve spending some one-on-one time with a kid, but they are a little different from each other. And both need more volunteers. Maybe one of them is the right fit for you.

## Ignite Youth Mentoring

Ignite was started in the Tri-Cities and has gained a national reputation. It's a model for how to connect the generations and reconnect kids who are at risk of becoming disconnected from society.

Ignite matches youth between 10 and 16 with a mentor who commits to spending four hours of time per month doing something together for a year. After the first year, if the match is working, you can stay with your kid until he or she ages out of the system. By then, in most cases, you've become lifelong friends.

Pairs are always matched by gender. Men with boys; women with girls. Because women are more likely to volunteer and because boys are more likely to need a role model, there is usually a waiting list of boys who need a mentor.

They are also matched by interests. You share a love of crafting or sports or reading.

Then you spend a couple of hours together a couple a times a month just "hanging out," as the kids say.

You don't lecture or preach or proselytize. You just talk and listen and model healthy relationships.

Ignite has 90 mentor matches in our community now. Its goal is to have 200 mentor matches by 2015.

There are more than a hundred times that many youths available to meet that goal. Would you believe the Tri-Cities has 20,000 kids living in a single-parent home, with grandparents or in the foster care system? All they're missing are mentors.

If you're interested, call 509-948-3143 or visit the organization's website at [IgniteYouthMentoring.com](http://IgniteYouthMentoring.com).

#### CASA-GAL program

Court-appointed special advocates and guardians ad litem give more time per month than the mentors, but the commitment is a shorter term than the mentoring program, which could stretch into years.

Court advocates devote about 10 hours per month per case and they need special training.

Advocates represent an often under-represented voice in the court system -- that of a child who has been removed from his or her home because of abuse or neglect.

Advocates spend time with the child, get to know him or her and attend court hearings to advocate for the child.

The program's caseload is about 200 kids and it has almost 80 active volunteers. So clearly, there's room for someone who has an interest.

Both programs require vigorous screenings, but neither is demanding.

The help will be appreciated, and the volunteer's life will be all the better for it.

And the result just may be getting a young person on the right path.

Read more here: <http://www.tri-cityherald.com/2014/02/04/2809107/our-voice-influence-a-generation.html#storylink=cpy>